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## Beech-Nut headquarters to move from St. Louis to upstate New York

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Beech-Nut Nutrition Corp., the country's second-largest maker of baby food by sales, will move its corporate headquarters from downtown St. Louis to eastern New York.

The company is building a \$124 million, 650,000-square-foot processing and manufacturing plant in the town of Florida in New York's Mohawk Valley. The facility could open in fall 2009, the company said Tuesday.

Beech-Nut, which has about 35 employees in St. Louis, will transfer its executive offices to upstate New York by August, leaving a small regional office for sales and customer support in St. Louis.

Beech-Nut had signed a lease and planned to move into a new business complex near Interstate 170 in Overland after the \$9 million project's scheduled completion this summer.

Jerry May, president pro tem of the Overland City Council, said he was not aware of Beech-Nut contacting the city to discuss the change in plans. He said the council heard about the move to New York last week. "It's all pretty sudden."

The move to New York state will end St. Louis' 17-year run as home base for the baby-food maker. The headquarters has been at 100 South Fourth Street.

Beech-Nut ♦ a subsidiary of the Hero Group of Lenzburg, Switzerland ♦ is replacing its primary plant in Canajoharie, N.Y., where Beech-Nut started in 1891 as a ham- and bacon-smoking operation. The Canajoharie plant is more than 100 years old and suffered extensive damage in flooding a year ago, which forced long downtime. As executives planned repairs, they also mulled over the headquarters location.

In November, company representatives met with staff of the St. Louis Regional Chamber and Growth Association.

"They actually told us at that time that they felt like they were operating at a disadvantage, not having their headquarters at the same place" as manufacturing operations, said Steve Johnson, RCGA senior vice president. But the company did not say it was planning to move out of state, and discussions didn't touch on financial incentives to keep Beech-Nut in the St. Louis area, he said.

In November 1989, Ralston Purina Co. of St. Louis bought Beech-Nut from Nestlé Enterprises, the U.S. wing of the giant Swiss food company, and announced plans to move Beech-Nut's headquarters from Pennsylvania to St. Louis. Ralcorp Holdings Inc., Ralston Purina's spun-off food business, later sold Beech-Nut in 1998.

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